

USGA GREEN SECTION WEB UPDATES

A Great Resource For Communication

By Todd Lowe

Communication is a vital component of an effective golf course superintendent. Yet sometimes, golf course superintendents need additional backup when dealing with issues like the impacts of weather, seasonal differences on golf course conditions, the need for increased maintenance practices, and sensitive subjects like tree removal.

Some golfers cannot be reached through newsletters or even direct contact with the golf course superintendent; and it helps to have an outside opinion from an unbiased professional. USGA agronomists are often called upon to communicate important information to golfers through the Turfgrass Advisory Service, which are on-site agronomic consulting visits.

USGA agronomists occasionally hear phrases like, "We're the only club that looks this brown," or "No other courses have winter fairways as tight as ours," or "Why are we the only club that aerates greens more than once yearly?"

The weather, seasonal playing conditions, and cultural management practices are all common issues discussed during TAS visits. USGA agronomists each visit more than 100 golf courses annually and they provide a wealth of information concerning topics that courses face. An important part of our job is explaining these common issues to golfers.

Superintendents and course officials can also glean the benefits of our travels by visiting the Green Section Web site and reading the Regional Updates published each month. Agronomists from each region write updates every three to four weeks on current playing conditions and factors affecting turf quality.

Updates are usually only a few paragraphs in length and are excellent resources to help golfers quickly understand important golf course



issues. Comments from unbiased professionals like USGA agronomists, are often easily received by golfers, since there is no motive for our remarks other than "for the good of the game."

The USGA Green Section Web site (www.usga.org/turf) has valuable resources including Regional Updates, *Green Section Record* articles, golf course construction guidelines, course official information, environmental publications, and turfgrass research.

With the click of the mouse, golf course superintendents have access to all of this information and can get a feel for what's going on in each region. The Regional Updates are archived on our Web site, so viewing past updates is easy.

Here are a few suggestions on how to access and utilize them:

- **Receive Regional Updates via e-mail.** To ensure you receive current updates, contact Kimberly Erusha at kerusha@usga.org and request to be added to the e-mail list. Regional Updates are sent out automatically, ensuring you won't miss one.

- **E-mail Regional Updates** to officials like Green Committee members, the general manager or director of golf.

- **Add this link** on your club's Web site so that golfers can easily access the information: http://www.usga.org/turf/regional_updates/regional_updates.html

- **Print Regional Updates** and place them in a visible area for golfers to read.

Improve your communication prowess by utilizing this free source of information. As always, never hesitate to contact me or John Foy if you need additional information or possibly some one-on-one consultation at your club.

Communicating the Sustainable Use of Pesticides to Golfers

By Todd Burkdoll

Superintendents are faced with all kinds of job-related questions, particularly about the agronomics of using pesticides and other chemicals on their courses. Many are having a hard time clearly explaining the benefits of chemical use to curious golfers and community members, and as a result, sometimes avoid the topic.

However, communicating with the public is no longer optional; superintendents must address questions, ease concerns and take part in community education programs on a regular basis in order to continue building and sustaining community confidence. Many golf course superintendents now take a proactive approach to combat the general public's misperceptions and fear of pesticides and convey their role as an environmental steward.

INDUSTRY PEERS GET THE WORD OUT

Superintendent Jed Spencer, CGCS, for Chenal Country Club in Little Rock, Ark., participates in monthly Greens Committee meetings and now hosts annual open houses to give all members a behind-the-scenes look at how he maintains his course. In addition to addressing topics such as chemical and fertilizer use, maintenance and even golf etiquette, his crew operates equipment for participants, allowing them to get a firsthand look at what his crew does and how they do it. Spencer's goal is to educate the community, and show members the purpose behind his crew's actions.

"The response to our communication efforts has been extremely positive," Spencer said. "Community members really appreciate the visual component. It reduces concerns about the possible effects our treatment plan could have on them and their surroundings."

Spencer has taken additional steps to show his concern for the environment, which the community has applauded. Three years ago, he formed a partnership with Ducks Unlimited to establish a wood duck colony on the course, which helps attract the birds and allows his crew to manage the population. He also maintains a chemical building on his property that houses a 1,000-gallon storage tank for recycling chemicals.

Fred Gehrisch, superintendent for Highlands Fall Country Club in Highlands, N.C., holds educational forums for residents living on or near his course to explain what his crew is spraying and why. He also writes a regular column for his local newspaper that addresses course issues such as the scientific benefits of safely controlling disease and invasive plants on his course.

Gehrisch also is involved in a study under way by the University of

Tips for Communicating with Your Community

- 1) **Know your topic** and know it well. Be willing to give research to back up what you are saying.
- 2) **Do not lie.** A lot of the information you share is a matter of common sense; however, your audiences will fact check.
- 3) **Be as consistent** as you can. Some information will change over the course of time, but the majority of it should remain constant.
- 4) **Be patient.** It is important to remember that members of the community are not as versed on the subject matter as you are.
- 5) **Provide resources** where people can obtain additional information. Encourage them to spend some time learning about the issues they care about.

- Todd Burkdoll

Missouri on salamanders at 10 courses in the area – including his – to see how they are affected by chemical use. Along with the university, he regularly works with environmental groups, whether it is coordinating joint speaking engagements or donating his staff to support a local event.

Gehrisch says most people he speaks with are relieved once they learn the chemicals he uses are similar to

everyday household products.

“I have found that using common medications as examples is the most effective way to demonstrate why they do not need to fear the products we use,” Gehrisch said. “I read a list of side effects and lead them to believe it is a chemical I am using to treat turf disease when, in reality, it is aspirin.”

Communicating with the public falls under the many day-to-day

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responsibilities of a superintendent, and more of them are taking it upon themselves to go above and beyond that duty. At a minimum, superintendents should be able to confidently explain the parallels between plant and human disease, and how science helps alleviate damage in both cases.

"We talk a lot within our inner circle about what needs to be done, but as an industry, we tend to be slower in responding to the public than we should," Gehrisch said. "For any change to happen, supers need to leave their desks and get out in front of their communities."

Despite the fact that pesticides are useful tools that can provide significant benefits to our communities, the debate over whether to use them will undoubtedly continue. By basing communications on science instead of emotion, superintendents can help community members appreciate the time, labor and money-saving benefits of environmentally sound chemicals.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *In keeping with the communications theme of this issue, our friends at BASF shared this article which provides some ideas on the topic of pesticide use.*

Bag Tags Spread The Good Word About Golf

Project EverGreen and GCBA A Announce Educational Outreach Program

Project EverGreen is teaming with Golf Course Builders Association of America Foundation's Sticks for Kids program and its partner the National Recreation and Park Association to give more than 60,000 children helpful information about the environmental benefits of golf courses. Sticks for Kids provides young people with their first golf experience and promotes the life values of the sport. Through the partnership, Project EverGreen and Sticks for Kids will provide golf club bag tags to 407 courses the first year.

The two versions of the bag tags read:

- Go hug that tree you just hit. The shade it's creating is trying to keep you cool out here.
- Nice divot. Now go fix it. That grass you're tearing up cleans the air so you can breathe a little easier.

"This humorous approach is a great way to give kids ages 5-15 the big picture about how important golf courses are to the environment and to them personally," says Den Gardner, executive director of Project EverGreen.

"Our partnership with Sticks for Kids is just one small part of our larger efforts to educate and inform people of all ages about the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of green spaces."

Golf clubs and marketing funds for the Sticks for Kids programs are provided by the GCBA A Foundation in conjunction with its partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association. Sticks for Kids will grow to more than 400 programs in 2009 and cover all 50 states in 2009.

"Promotion of the environmental advantages of green spaces is very important to our members," GCBA A Executive Director Paul Foley said. "We appreciate the opportunity to work with Project EverGreen to get this message out to the youth that represent the future of our sport."

Project EverGreen is a national nonprofit service organization representing service providers, associations, suppliers/distributors, media companies, and others affiliated with the green industry. Project EverGreen's mission is to preserve and enhance green space in our communities for today and future generations. To learn more about Project EverGreen visit www.projectevergreen.com or call 877-758-4835. The Golf Course Builders Association of America is a nonprofit trade association of the world's foremost golf course builders and leading suppliers to the golf course construction industry. It was founded in the early 1970s and its members represent all segments of the golf course



industry. The GCBA A Foundation is the charitable arm of the GCBA A and a separate, 501(c)(3) organization. The GCBA A's national executive office is located in Lincoln, Neb. For more information, visit www.gcbaa.org or call 402-476-4444